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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8522
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 9266
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG LIMA 5351
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RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4049
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SUBJECT: SENTENCING OF SOLDIERS IN ARAUCA LABOR CASE

1. A Bogota court sentenced four Colombian soldiers to 40 years each for murdering three union leaders in Saravena, Arauca department on August 5, 2004. The court ruling, announced August 28, found the soldiers guilty of executing labor leaders Jairo Eduardo Prieto Chamucero, Hector Alirio Martinez and Leonel Goyeneche Goyeneche and arranging the bodies so that they appeared to have been guerrillas killed in combat. The individuals sentenced were Sub-Lieutenant Juan Pablo Ordonez, and soldiers Jhon Hernandez, Walter Loaiza, and Oscar Hernandez of the Eighteenth Mechanized Brigade, Second Division. A civilian, Daniel Caballero Roza, who served as guide for the unit, was also convicted and sentenced to 40 years. Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos said the ruling "ratifies the Government's policy that actions outside of the law will be condemned, and underscores the GOC's policy of respect for unionists."

2. The Embassy has repeatedly highlighted the importance of resolving the Arauca case in meetings with the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of Defense, and the Presidential Human Rights Program director. The case is also one of the 204 priority labor cases being handled by the Prosecutor General's special sub-unit investigating and prosecuting violence against labor unionists.
Nichols